

# Proverbs 3:11-18

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/prov/prov-3/proverbs-311-18/>

*Even when it is difficult to accept or understand, God's ways are truly best for us.*

In the previous passage (Proverbs 3:5-10), Solomon (assuming the role of *father*) encourages his audience (given the role of *son*) to trust in the Lord rather than in their own understanding. Here he addresses the kinds of situations when doing this is most difficult.

He begins by once again addressing his audience as *my son* and instructs *do not reject the discipline of the Lord or loathe His reproof*. Just like a child, we often do not understand the Lord's *discipline*. We see it as abuse, something we do not like. It is pain, and we desire comfort. We may, therefore, *reject* it.

Deciding not to trust *the discipline of the Lord* or see it as valuable, we often choose to perceive the one who disciplines us as our enemy. *We loathe His reproof* because we do not see or trust its value. And this leads to us leaning on our own understanding, as we were urged not to do in verse 5. We do not trust that our disciplinarian is acting in our best interest. So we trust ourselves. But, like children, that means we will inevitably engage in self-destructive behavior. We will, figuratively-speaking, play in the street, stick our finger into an electrical socket, or jump into a pool before we know how to swim. We will do this because our limited perspective does not allow us to truly comprehend what is in our best interest.

Proverbs tells us that refusing to see God's benevolence is a distortion of reality. The truth is, *The Lord loves those He reproveth, even as a father corrects the son in whom he delights*. The real betrayal would be to leave us uncorrected. If a father did not *love* and *delight* in his *son*, he would not take the time to correct him—for the son's benefit. Letting a child have their own way can be dangerous, not only in terms of the patterns it sets for a growing person, but even in the immediate situation.

*Discipline* is lumped here under the previous admonitions—teaching, wisdom, correction. God does all of this, not to abuse us for His own amusement, but to teach us how the world works, to align our awareness with reality, and to show us the true (but difficult) path of our own best self-interest. This path often includes things like delayed gratification and perseverance, which may seem paradoxical. In this paradox, we can either fight against what God says and chase our own way (to our own hurt). Or we can trust God and place our hope in Him and the path He set before us. God's intention is *love* and care. He *delights* in us and wants what is best for us. He is a loving Father who desires our best.

Solomon asks the rhetorical question: *how blessed is the man who finds wisdom and the man who gains understanding?* Wisdom is valuable in our life, but it comes at a cost. The cost includes discipline and delayed gratification. But Solomon's point here is that the blessed nature that accompanies wisdom is significantly better than either the cost, or the superficial things we think we gain from following our flesh.

The acquisition of wisdom is *better than the profit of silver and her gain better than fine gold*. If the choice is between wisdom and money, take wisdom. Solomon knows this firsthand. God offered Solomon anything he wanted, you might say He offered to “grant one wish.” Solomon chose wisdom, and because he chose wisdom, God granted all the rest (1 Kings 3:5-15). Consistent with these Proverbs, that is generally what you would expect. Those with the most wisdom would be the most just and the best investors.

Wisdom and understanding are truly in our best interest. In fact, they are more valuable than any competitors for our affection. They are the path to the most valuable *profit* in this world and the only strategy for meaningful *gain*. The word for *profit* is the Hebrew “cachar” and is often translated “merchandise”—it is the fruit of our efforts, the end result of whatever we do in this life. The word for *gain* is “tebuw’ah” and it means “increase” or “revenue”—it is the measure of improvement. What we gain or accomplish through our investment of time in this life. In both ways, wisdom excels over all else.

Therefore, Wisdom (*she*) is *more precious than jewels; and nothing you desire compares with her*. Wisdom, then, is better than owning the “crown jewels.” It is about how to use the resources given to us to accomplish what we actually *desire* more than all else—a life of purpose. Only by reaching this deep, internal value are we *blessed*. Wisdom is the way, the path that leads to this blessing. Without wisdom, all the resources in the world will be a shackle or, at best, an empty distraction. None of our superficial *desires* or fears of *discipline* compare with the vast *profit* of wisdom.

*Long life is in her (Wisdom’s) right hand*. The dominant hand in Hebrew literature is *the right hand*. It is a symbol of strength and dominion. In this, Wisdom holds the key to *long life*. This could be an allusion to the value of delayed gratification. Being fit while young pays dividends when old, for example. If we abuse our bodies when young, it tends to shorten our lifespan from what it would have otherwise been. The troublesome toil of wisely raising children while young leads to enjoyable family togetherness when old.

It could also include the extreme benefit of wisdom for living in peace. Living in non-reality, seeking to control the uncontrollable, striving to gain purpose through the practice of folly—all lead to great stress. Stress is the root cause of many illnesses, which will inevitably shorten our lifespan.

Living in wisdom frees us from carrying the weight of anxiety that so often manifests in physical symptoms. Wisdom shows us what we cannot control (which is almost everything). We can entrust all those things to God, which relieves us of an immense burden we are not able to carry. On the other hand, wisdom also shows us what we can control, our proper boundaries, and shows us the path to faithful stewardship. If we steward well, we achieve our purpose, which brings peace. Walking in this attitude of wisdom will also generally lead to an extended life.

On the other hand, *her (wisdom’s) left hand are riches and honor*. This imagery includes the idea of balance and connection, like the scales of justice. Consistency and clarity are in the dominant right hand. Prosperity and influence are in the other. Wisdom is the thing that allows these life pursuits to work in meaningful collaboration. When *wisdom* brings us *riches and honor*, those

become additional items over which to be good stewards, rather than snares that entrap us and lead us off course. *Wisdom* leads us to use our time, our resources, and our reputation in a way that brings true joy to us and to others. This is only possible through *wisdom*.

*Her (wisdom's) ways are pleasant ways and all her paths are peace.* As opposed to evil, wisdom is an alignment with reality. And living in harmony with God's design for the world is more fruitful, fun (*pleasant*), and calming (*peace*) than constantly fighting against the true nature of who we are, who God is, and the reality of existence.

*She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her.* The *tree of life* is an allusion to the Garden of Eden where the original Tree of Life stood as representative of God's provision for the human race to live forever. Eating from the Tree of Life was free game for Adam and Eve, but the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was forbidden (for their own good). Once Adam and Eve sinned by eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they were banned from Eden so they would not eat from the Tree of Life and live forever in a fallen state (Genesis 3:22). Thus *taking hold of her* (wisdom) creates a new sort of *tree of life* that allows us to participate and align with the eternal. This *tree of life* illustration could also allude to the great rewards God promises in the next life for living a life of wisdom (Revelation 2:7).

*And happy are all who hold her fast.* There is no greater joy than seeking and achieving that for which we were created. The Hebrew word for *happy* is "ashar," which is most often translated "blessed." The root of the word means "to go straight" or "advance/make progress." So, *holding* onto wisdom allows us to march forward, to progress and grow through the adventure of life. Embracing wisdom allows those who *hold her fast* to be *happy* regardless of circumstances, because they have a perspective that is rooted in the eternal, through their trust in God.

## **Biblical Text**

**My son, do not reject the discipline of the Lord  
Or loathe His reproof,  
12 For whom the Lord loves He reproves,  
Even as a father corrects the son in whom he delights.  
13 How blessed is the man who finds wisdom  
And the man who gains understanding.  
14 For her profit is better than the profit of silver  
And her gain better than fine gold.  
15 She is more precious than jewels;  
And nothing you desire compares with her.  
16 Long life is in her right hand;  
In her left hand are riches and honor.  
17 Her ways are pleasant ways  
And all her paths are peace.  
18 She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her,  
And happy are all who hold her fast.**